

Senators Get Facts Aplenty From a Jovial McNamara

By Chalmers M. Roberts
Washington Post Staff Writer

He sat forward in the leather chair, hunched against the three microphones, twiddling a black ball-point pen in his left hand on top of the green baize-covered table.

He was Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense. So many have so long imagined him as the self-certain and self-aggressive computer-mind, whiz-kid, tough-guy, that it is a wrench to accept any other view.

But yesterday before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee he seemed to be a very human fellow, even to the point of eloquent advocacy of the Great Society here at home, especially to meet the unfulfilled needs in the City of Washington in whose problems his wife has taken a major personal interest.

True, he did flood the Senators with facts and figures about bomb supplies and aircraft sorties and he rattled off the text of a military directive so rapidly that the stenographer could hardly keep up with his words.

But then he once said "I've forgotten" a particular fact; he conceded that "my experience in international affairs is still limited" and he joked, when asked how long he had been at the Pentagon, that "some think too long."

He used flattery on Sen.

John Williams (R-Del.) ("you more than anyone else in Congress" have advocated economy) though he was slightly testy to Sen. Joseph C. Clark (D-Pa.) after a couple of quarrelsome questions.

The expected fireworks with Sen. Wayne Morse (D-Ore.), who used to call Vietnam "McNamara's war," sounded more like cocktail party conversation in tone. Through it all McNamara's words seemed less pointedly directed to the Senators facing him than to the television camera with its twin red "on" lights.

In reading his prepared statement McNamara expunged some of the Pentagon gobbledygook to make it more understandable for those listening in the boondocks; he even dropped his favored "cost-effective" for "productive."

When Sen. Albert Gore (D-Tenn.) questioned him about the role of the American military in the coming South Vietnamese elections, McNamara answered forthrightly "none." Gore, who believes that elections may lead to a regime which could end the war, was well pleased. Now it will be impossible, he said later, for American helicopters to be used to help affect the outcome by hauling voters to the polls.

McNamara sounded like a political science lecturer as he recounted his study of the relation, or non-relation,

of American military aid to military coups around the world. But he was at his most ardent when he spoke of his determination not to end up after this war the way the United States did after Korea, with a massive surplus of unneeded arms.

At the beginning, McNamara had appeared rather apprehensive and his tone was defensive.

But McNamara relaxed as the clock's hands turned and in the end Sen. Gale McGee (D-Wyo.) took over the Administration's chore of denying Chairman J. William Fulbright's opening assertion that the United States was "arrogant and self-righteous."

The Secretary could afford to relax. It was a morning well spent and it served to refurbish some of his tarnished reputation on Capitol Hill.